

Character Class

Sturdy Brawlers 4

Personality Types

By Skip Williams



During the past few installments of Character Class, we considered [races](#), [weapons](#), and [armor](#) for martial characters. This time, we conclude our look into martial characters by considering less concrete aspects of character creation. Namely, how the character acts and why the character took up a fighting career in the first place.

As with any occupation, serving as a fighting character in a party of adventures offers both rewards and hardships. The difficulties a fighting character encounters are easy to enumerate. They must be ready to exert themselves physically at almost any time. They must risk life and limb in deadly physical combat. They must spend hours, if not days, at a time encased in weighty armor that can hardly remain comfortable to wear for such long periods. Finally, they must deal with a recurrent, or possibly continuous, feeling of exhaustion and many episodes of physical pain from battle wounds or other injuries.

The rewards of a fighting career are harder to pin down. All successful adventurers enjoy numerous rewards, such as wealth, reputation, and the knowledge that they have experienced and accomplished things that most folks can only dream about. Martial characters, however, must value a few other things or they wouldn't become fighting characters. Perhaps these characters feel a special thrill when they come to grips with foes and defeat them using nothing more than muscle, stamina, steel, and well-honed fighting instincts. Fighting characters probably also feel satisfaction from knowing that their comrades depend on them for protection from physical dangers. In any case, it pays to think about what brings your character satisfaction. When you do so, you'll find it much easier to think and act as your character would.

Some Basic Personality Types

Almost any kind of person might take up a fighting career. If you're new to the game, however, consider one of the possibilities presented here. After trying a few of these, you'll be ready to try some of your own.

Brash

These characters choose martial careers because they offer direct and uncomplicated approaches to life's difficulties. Or they might take up fighting simply because they haven't considered any other alternatives. Brash characters aren't necessarily shallow or foolish, but they often are. A brash character tends to act first and consider the situation later, if ever.

A character might be brash because of inexperience. He might be young and fresh from the farm, urban neighborhood, or noble castle. He hasn't encountered enough adversity or misfortune to worry much about the consequences of his actions. A brash and youthful character also might come from a difficult childhood and be well acquainted with privation, dishonesty, and even death. He might consider himself invulnerable to misfortunes (after all, he's still alive), or he might have decided that it's best to charge ahead and embrace life as much as possible before cruel fate overtakes him.

A brash character might have plenty of life experience but act impulsively anyway. The character might believe that a positive attitude and quick action produce the best results, especially when facing the unknown.

In any case, brash characters rely on their personal fortitude, luck, and capacity for quick action to carry the day. They aren't averse to planning ahead, especially when a respected ally urges caution. They just aren't likely to think ahead themselves. The character also isn't prone to looking too deeply beyond the obvious facts in any situation. The character might prove an easy mark for con artists, or he might mistrust strangers (trusting his sword arm more than other



creatures' capacity for honest dealing).

Barbarians are often brash, using their rage powers for that extra push they need to prevail when things turn out more difficult than they initially seemed. Some successful fighters and swashbucklers are brash as well, charging into combat without apology or delay. Some paladins are brash, especially the crusading types who are eager to strike a blow for their cause.

Brash characters often have chaotic alignments to suit their impulsive nature, but it's certainly possible to be brash and lawful. Such characters have one-track minds and tend to see things in terms of stark black and white. A brash character might be good or evil. A good character who is brash might be overly trusting or very much focused on serving some greater good or short-term goal. In evil characters, brashness often translates into a violent nature and an abrupt manner.

Most brash characters are humans, half-orcs, or halflings. Dwarves or elves usually are too disciplined or thoughtful to be brash, but exceptions are possible.

Crude

These characters relish their physical prowess. They like breaking things and smashing their foes into pulp. They choose fighting careers because they emphasize brute force over trickery or finesse. In any case, crude characters usually lack social graces. They scratch, belch, spit, and don't waste much time with the nicer social conventions.

A crude character might be ignorant of the social rules she breaks, or she might enjoy offending other people's sensibilities. She might always have been something of a boor and bully, or she might have gradually become jaded and developed an abrasive and rebellious nature. Perhaps some dire event in the character's past broke her down. Some crude characters might come from privileged backgrounds -- they're so spoiled they've never had to worry about offending anyone, and they're not accustomed to finishing second.

Unlike a brash character, however, the crude character often embraces careful reconnaissance and planning -- all the better for producing maximum carnage once she enters battle. Crude characters may relish single combat for the unadulterated joy of an unshared victory.

Not surprisingly, many barbarians are crude. Crude hexblades use their spells to create extra mayhem, and crude fighters can do very well. Paladins, knights, and samurai, with their courtly ways and traditions, usually don't do well as crude characters.

Crudity can pair well with most alignments. Chaotic characters are accustomed to doing things their own way, and disdain for social conventions often comes naturally to them. Likewise, a chaotic outlook lends itself well to a taste for destruction. Evil characters often find that crude actions make them more fearsome. Evil characters usually don't care how their actions affect others. Good characters are seldom crude unless they simply don't know any better or they harbor a rebellious streak.

Half-orcs and dwarves, with their racial Charisma penalties, often are crude. Halflings, with their penchant for wandering in uncivilized lands, and gnomes, with their love of pranks and jokes, usually have no trouble being crude. Elves and half-elves, with their high culture and flair for diplomacy, usually don't do well as crude characters unless you're out to deliberately play them against type.

Taciturn

Some martial characters have flinty personalities and unsympathetic natures. The uncompromising nature of physical combat -- you must fight and win to survive -- suits them well. Such characters often shrug off the discomforts of a martial career, and they're capable of killing without feeling a bit of remorse.

A taciturn character might be driven by some powerful desire such as revenge, wealth, or status. Or perhaps the character has a tragic past that caused him to withdraw into himself, building emotional armor every bit as tough as



the physical armor he wears. Another might be fatalistic, weary of the world's troubles and resigned to fate that condemns him to endless struggles against earthly foes and his own inner demons. Or perhaps the character is doomed by some prophetic curse, real or imagined.

A taciturn character is always a smart and deadly combatant. He might fight according to some plan, even if it's as simple as defeating his foes one by one. Perhaps he simply throws himself utterly into a battle, risking all in a bid to win or to die trying. Thanks to his unfeeling nature, a taciturn character isn't given to taking prisoners or granting mercy, though his friends might persuade him to show mercy if the group can gain some advantage by doing so.



A member of any martial class might be taciturn, except for barbarians, who are prone to displays of powerful emotions. Even so, a barbarian might maintain a facade of even temper, which he breaks only under extreme circumstances.

Taciturn characters often follow a personal code or serve some tradition or higher power. This personality is well suited for lawful characters. Taciturn characters have steady minds and tightly controlled emotions, which makes this personality ill suited for chaotic characters unless they're downright mean and ruthless. Evil characters might easily be taciturn. Good characters aren't often taciturn unless they're fatalistic or prone to melancholy.

A character of almost any race might become taciturn. Dwarves are infamous for being gruff and well suited to a taciturn personality.

Noble

Some characters believe that fighting is a high calling (perhaps the highest calling). These characters stand at the front of a party, facing the worst dangers, because they know someone must do it, and it might as well be them. Most of these characters are natural leaders, though many of them accept subordinate roles.

A character might be literally noble -- that is, an aristocrat. Others can come from humble backgrounds. Many noble characters are well educated. Privileged characters might have attended formal schools or learned from private tutors. Characters from modest or poor backgrounds probably had some influential mentor who gave them a sense of mission in life. In either case, a noble character has a sense of history and understands that the success or failure of any venture often depends on a single person who makes a heroic effort or sacrifice at the right place and at the right time.

A noble character prefers to lead the attack when entering battle. This urge to be out front might arise from vanity -- the character sees herself as a great hero who simply must lead the charge. Other noble characters consider the whole group when entering combat. When possible, they formulate plans for getting the most out of the group's abilities. Naturally, the battle plan places the noble character front and center because she has the physical prowess to anchor the group.

A noble character often has some personal code that affects how she fights. For example, the character might never accept retreat as an option in combat, eschew ranged or reach weaponry because she thinks keeping foes at a distance is unchivalrous, or refuse to attack flat-footed opponents. Others will consider any course of action that might ultimately bring success. The choice ultimately boils down to how the character sees herself -- indefatigable champion or dedicated servant.



Any martial class can fit with the noble personality, though paladin, knight, or samurai are natural matches.

Barbarians and fighters also make great self-sacrificing (or self-absorbed) heroes.

Nobility fits best with lawful alignments in keeping with the character type's propensity to consider others first. A noble character could be chaotic, especially if most of her noble sentiments involve herself. Likewise, nobility fits better with good than evil, though even an evil character might dedicate herself to some cause or think of herself as a great leader or hero.

Dwarves, with their sense of community and forbearance in the face of adversity, fit the noble type well. Elves and half-elves often have a sense of history or a talent for getting along with others which suits the noble type. Humans and halflings, too, can rise to great heights when serving a higher purpose or simply protecting kith and kin.

Clever

These characters enjoy the thrill of victory no matter how minor or how it's achieved. A clever martial character has plenty of brawn but prefers to rely on his brains. They choose fighting careers to take advantage of their natural talents for physical tasks and because they like taking risks. They're not afraid to engage in lethal combat when necessary but are just as happy when they can embarrass or hoodwink foes. Some clever characters can't resist showing off a little. They not only fight smart, they make sure everyone knows it.

Clever characters often come from backgrounds where resourcefulness is a necessity. They might be orphans who grew up on the streets, former soldiers forced to live off the land for a time, or poor peasants who've eked out a living from a small parcel of land. Sometimes, clever characters were sickly or puny children who worked hard to become fit or who simply found themselves hale and hearty once they got their full growth. A clever character might have suffered a grave defeat and learned the hard way that sometimes it pays to think before crossing swords with a foe, or perhaps the character had an opportunity to work for a while with a true strategist. For example, the character might have been a servant to a famous general or had a friend who was a grizzled veteran of many wars.

Clever characters seldom plunge into fights without taking some time to learn what they face. Even when ambushed, they'll often attempt to withdraw to a safe place until they get their bearings or at least turn their attention to foes who seem familiar before tangling with opponents whose powers they can only guess.

Many swashbucklers embrace the clever type, albeit with some panache thrown in. Martial characters who have some magic to wield, such as paladins or hexblades, can do well as clever characters. The clever type usually doesn't work well for barbarians, because they tend to lose control when raging. However, a barbarian who shows some animal cunning and who is judicious about raging could be very successful as a clever character.

A character of any alignment might be clever. Chaotic characters tend to be flamboyantly clever. Lawful characters tend to be more careful and steadfast. Good clever characters discreetly use their power and intellect to solve problems with a minimum of violence and bloodshed. Evil clever characters tend to be sly and calculating.

Elves, halflings, and gnomes often adopt the clever type out of necessity. Humans and half-elves, too, often find that the surest way to victory is through clear thinking. Dwarves and half-orcs usually prefer action over deliberation, but even these races produce their share of strategists and even a few showoffs.

In Conclusion

As noted earlier, these are only a few options for martial characters. Keep in mind that the examples presented here can be combined to create more complex characters. For example, your character might be high-minded and noble but with a hint of brashness.

You can create your own personality types as well. Consider why your character chose a fighting profession and what life experiences might have led up to that decision. Also consider how the character's personality and history affect the way the character handles a fight.



About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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